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NOTES ON THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF TZELTAL COMMUNITIES
OF CHIAPAS

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[Issued June 30, 1939]

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NOTES ON THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF TZELTAL COMMUNITIES OF CHIAPAS

In February and March of 1938, Alfonso Villa Rojas made an ethnological reconnaissance of Tzeltal settlements in northeastern Chiapas, Mexico. The work was done under the auspices of Carnegie Institution of Washington as a guide to the planning of more intensive field work. San Cristobal de las Casas, where Mr. Villa arrived on the first of February, served naturally as a base. A short trip was taken to Teopizca and Amatenango, and a second to visit the ruins of San Gregorio and the village of Chanal. On the fourteenth of that month, Mr. Villa started northward from Las Casas, visiting fifteen Tzeltal settlements, and then entered Chol country at Tila and left Chiapas by airplane from Salto de Agua.

In Mexico City Mr. Villa was provided with a letter of introduction from Ing. Ignacio Marquina, head of the Department of Prehistoric Monuments, of the Secretariat of Public Education. In Tuxtla Gutierrez the Governor of Chiapas, Ing. Efraim Gutierrez, received Mr. Villa and heard from him explanation of Mr. Villa's interests and purposes. Mr. Frans Blom had given Mr. Villa a letter of introduction, but the person addressed was not in Las Casas when Mr. Villa arrived. In Las Casas Mr. Villa received great help from Don José Villanueva. To all these persons who extended kindness and help, grateful acknowledgment is made. Dr. Ruth Bunzel kindly wrote information on the region to Mr. Villa before he began his journey.

The Tzeltal communities, given in the order in which they were visited and with indication of the length of time spent in each, were as follows: Amatenango (2 days), Chanal (2 days), Tenejapa (3 days), Cancuc (1 day), Oxchuc (5 days), San Martín (1 day), Tenango (2 days), Sivacá (1 day), Ococingo (6 days), Bachajón (2 days), Citalá (2 days), Guauquitepec (2½ days), Chilón (2 days), Yajalon (2 days), Petalcingo (½ day).

These villages have been the locus of a number of Indian uprisings, and disturbances have occurred recently, in 1914, 1917, and 1930. Therefore the inhabitants of Spanish culture (Ladinos) are not infrequently uneasy. In Cancuc and Oxchuc Mr. Villa's work was impeded by a revival of this uneasiness, the Ladinos fearing that the celebrations of the carnival season might lead the Indians to acts of violence. With this exception, however, Mr. Villa found the Indians accessible and conditions of work favorable. The information reported herein was obtained in almost every instance from Indians, not Ladinos. Mr. Villa used an interpreter in cases where the Indians did not speak Spanish; although he has a command of Yucatec, and has done ethnological work in Yucatan, he does not speak Tzeltal.

The notes Starr collected on the Tzeltal in 1901 were apparently obtained

For a short description of these ruins, see Schuman, 1936, pp. 296-305.

* Vicente Pineda, 1888.

* Redfield and Villa, 1934.

* Starr, 1909.

* Ibid., pp. 60-72.

114 chiefly at Tenejapa and Cancuc. In 1925 Blom and LaFarge¹ entered the Tzeltal country from the north, visiting Bachajón, Sivacá, Tenango, Cancuc, Tenejapa, and Amatenango. These authors have published a short general account² of the culture of these people. In 1928 the John Geddings Gray Memorial Expedition of the Tulane University of Louisiana passed through the villages of Ococingo and Sivacá, and visited the hacienda "El Real." At this last place Carlos Basauri, a member of the expedition, collected notes on the Tzeltals.³ Marcos E. Becerra, who was for ten years head of the Department of Public Education of Chiapas, assembled information on the languages, ethnography, and history of the Indians of the highlands and of other parts of the state.⁴ Dr. Ruth Bunzel has spent some time recently in the region; her materials are unpublished.

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361 The Tzeltal-speaking communities may be divided into those situated in the highlands (Amatenango, Chanal, Tenejapa, Cancuc, Oxchuc, San Martín, and Tenango), and those situated at less than 1000 m. above sea level and that consequently enjoy a warmer climate (Sivacá, Ococingo, Bachajón, Citalá, Guaquitepec, Chilon, Yajalón, and Petalcingo).

133 In general the State of Chiapas is highly dissected and mountainous. It is crossed from east to west with three cordilleras, with subdivisions into various branches which cross with one another to form a complicated orographic system.⁵ The ranges which cross the Tzeltal region are those belonging to the Cordillera de Hueitepec,⁶ reaching an altitude of 2597 m. above sea level⁷ in a mountain of this name situated east of the city of Las Casas. With the exception of some Chamula settlements, this is the settlement of greatest altitude (2110 m. above sea level)⁸ in the entire state. From this point and continuing northward are to be found the other pueblos Villa visited. The land decreases in altitude until it reaches the Ococingo Valley where there is a sharp descent of 600 m.⁹ From here on, the terrain is not so dissected and the altitude is less than 1000 m. above sea level and becomes gradually less.

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823 As is natural, the climates of these two zones present marked differences which have given rise to the expressions "tierra fría" and "tierra caliente" by which the natives distinguish them. The former refers to the higher region where, according to Amram, "The temperature rarely falls below freezing, though in November, 1935, it dropped as low as 24° F. During the long dry period, when for weeks at a time no rain falls, the temperature in the shade occasionally rises above 75°, and the temperature in the sun may reach well over 100°. The relative humidity is low, and there are great differences between shade and sun temperatures. The nights are cool."¹⁰

The region of the tierra caliente begins in the Valley of Ococingo and the temperature rises as one goes northward. At Salto de Agua, 73 m. above sea level, one experiences tropical heat.

¹ Blom and LaFarge, 1927.

² *Ibid.*, 2: 324-400.

³ Basauri, 1931.

⁴ Becerra, 1932 and 1933.

⁵ Emeterio Pinera, 1845, p. 20. See also Waihel, 1935, pp. 60-77.

⁶ Santiabáñez, 1911, p. 2.

⁷ Emeterio Pinera, 1845, p. 20.

⁸ Blom and LaFarge, 1927, 2: 318.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2: 377.

¹⁰ Amram, 1937, p. 52.

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As is the case in the highlands of Guatemala, the outstanding social unit, corresponding to a tribe, is the population of several hundred or several thousand Indians whose activities center in one leading settlement from which the community gets its name. As in Guatemala, these communities vary greatly with respect to the proportion of Indians living permanently in this central settlement. Dr. Tax¹ uses the phrase "town nucleus type" for Guatemalan Indian communities in which all or a large majority of the Indians live in the principal settlement, and the phrase "vacant town type" for those in which most of the Indians live in scattered rural habitations, coming to the town center occasionally for commercial, governmental, or festal reasons. Among the Tzeltals the town-nucleus type is less atypical than it is in Guatemala, and the town-nucleus communities are suffering from a scarcity of land. The following communities may be regarded as of this type: Amatenango, San Martín, Tenango, Sivacá, Petalcingo, and probably also Chanal and Citalá, although at least in the case of the last two, there are also considerable numbers of Indians dwelling in the countryside. The vacant-town type of community is represented by Cancuc, Oxchuc, Bachajón, and Chilón. It will be seen that both types are represented in both highlands and lowlands. With respect to this classification Tenejapa, Guaquitepec, and Yajalon are intermediate, and illustrate Tax's "Type III" in that many of the people live in the town and work their fields closely surrounding it while many live on their farms and only occasionally come to town.

As in the highlands of Guatemala, the ethnic distinction between Indian and Ladino is marked; here also the Ladinos are much outnumbered by the Indians, and here too the Ladinos are very predominately town-dwellers. In Chilón and Yajalon the permanent town-dwellers are chiefly Ladinos; the permanent population of Oxchuc consists of about seventy Ladino families; the several thousand Indians live about the town and in the country. In other towns (Tenejapa, Citalá, Guaquitepec, and Petalcingo) a considerable number of Ladino families have become established, although in these communities there are more Indians even among the inhabitants of the town itself than there are Ladinos. A general disposition to exclude Ladinos from permanent settlement in Indian communities is most marked in Cancuc, the site of the uprising of 1712, and where in 1935 some Ladino merchants were slain by the Indians. No Ladinos reside there now. In Amatenango, Chanal, Bachajón, San Martín, Tenango, and Sivacá the Indians are also unfavorable to settlement by Ladinos; in each of the three last-named villages the only Ladino residents are the school-teacher and the government-imposed municipal agent. Recently a few Ladino tradespeople have settled in Bachajón, and a "Center of Native Education" has been established there (as also at Amatenango) by the Mexican national government. In the lowland towns of

¹ Tax, 1937, pp. 227-244.

² It is interesting that in Tenejapa, where both Indians and Ladinos live in town, the two groups recognize different patron saints, and there are separate schools for Indians and for Ladinos, whereas in Oxchuc, where all the Indians live outside the town, the same saints are worshipped by both groups, but the Ladinos maintain their own celebration on the day of the festival.

³ Vicente Pineta, 1938.

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563 Citalá, Guaquitepec, Chilón, Yajalón, and Petalcingo relations between Indians and Ladinos are more friendly, and the Indians are regarded as milder and more tractable.

181 Of the strongly Indian towns, Cancuc is the most conservative. Chanal the most progressive

631 In respect to official political organization, these villages are divided according to their importance and the number of their inhabitants, into free municipalities (municipios libres) and dependent municipalities (agencias municipales). The former are those which have the right to choose their own government, upon which formal administration depends. To this category belong Amatenango, Chánal, Tenejapa, Oxchuc, Ococingo, Chilón, and Bachajón. Until a short time ago the municipal governments of these settlements were composed of Ladinos in the principal posts and of Indians in the subordinate positions. At the present time the government is seeking to reverse this situation so that the Indians have the greater authority; it is for this reason that the governments of the four villages first mentioned are now headed by Indians. This change has brought about marked alterations in certain places in the social equilibrium that before existed between the two ethnic elements which compose the population.

[177] Villages of the latter category are those which depend, in administrative matters, on a free municipality. In these cases authority is represented in the first place by the *agente municipal*, who is named by the central municipal government. This post is always discharged by a Ladino. In most instances the municipal agent compensates for the meagerness of his salary by controlling the sale of rum in the village which he administers. The other members of the municipal government are chosen almost always from the Indian group.

184 In several of the highland communities, notably Amatenango, Chanal, and to a much less extent, Tenejapa, the Indian grows (in addition to the universal maize) a certain amount of wheat for export; the Ladinos of Oxchuc cultivate this crop, but in Cancuc, where there are no Ladinos, wheat is not grown. (Wheat is also grown in the Tzotzil towns of Chamula and Huixtán.) Other money crops of the highlands are chickpeas, peas, oranges, and other fruit. Some coffee is grown in San Martín; it is the principal export from Yajalón and Petalcingo. In Bachajón, Citalá, Guaquitepec, and Chilón a principal produce is brown sugar, made locally from sugar cane locally raised. Cancuc is the only village that cultivates cotton commercially; the production in the other communities is insignificant. The local manufacture of loom-woven clothing is rapidly disappearing. Most Tzeltal communities are without beehives, but there is considerable apiculture in Sivacá, and a little beekeeping is also practised in Tenango, Bachajón, and Yajalón. Apparently the bees kept are wild colonies brought to the villages in the sections of hollow log they are made to inhabit. The raising of hogs and poultry is a principal economic recourse in all the Indian settlements. The beef cattle industry has always been in the hands of Ladinos; however, recently the Government, acting through the Centers of Native Education, has sought to stimulate the industry among the Indians.

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The Indians manufacture and consume *chicha*, an alcoholic beverage fermented from sugar cane or maize. They drink larger quantities of rum prepared in Ladino-owned distilleries. *Pilico*, a combination of lime and tobacco, is chewed frequently, especially in Oxchuc, Tenejapa, and Cancuc.

Tenejapa is the only Tzeltal town that enjoys importance as a market center. Here a market is held every Sunday.

Pottery is made for sale outside the local community in Amatenango and in Tenango. In almost all the other communities the industry is practised in a rudimentary form merely to supply local needs. Blom and LaFarge observed and reported the techniques of pottery manufacture at Sivacá; "Villa limits his data to mentioning the industry there. Blom and LaFarge report, on hearsay, the method of making large, egg-shaped, three-handled water jars at Tenango; Villa observed and reported this industry. The former authors report that the clay used is "a light greenish brown colour." "Villa says that two kinds of clay, "white earth" and "red earth," are combined to form the paste. Villa also noted the tempering with a ground sandy limestone (*hi*); and the painting with a paint made from a soft stone from the river (*huxu-tzaiik*). The pots and griddles are made from one kind of clay tempered with a different sandstone called *bax*. The method of firing described for Sivacá by Blom and LaFarge from hearsay, involving the preparation of "an A-roof, forming a long tunnel," "was observed and photographed by Villa in Tenango. Villa was told that vessels after firing are filled with *pozole* in water to reduce the porosity.

In Tenejapa metates are made for export, and in Oxchuc halters, lead-ropes, nets, and bags. The methods of weaving, net making and basketry, reported by Blom and LaFarge for Bachajón "were not reported by Villa.

The type of habitation is the same throughout the whole region, although there are small variations from village to village. The houses are rectangular in form with four-sided roofs, thatched with grass, and with sides made of poles and clay. Only the houses of Chanal form an exception. The walls of these structures are in most cases of wood. The houses of Tenango present another exception in that they are the only ones where the roofs do not terminate in a ridge, but in a point; it is usual to cover this with an inverted pot. Houses are throughout divided into two rooms, one of which serves as living room and kitchen and the other as sleeping room. In some cases the kitchen is placed in the latter section. There is a single door in front; only in certain settlements to the north, as Chilón and Yajalon, where the influence of the white man has been greater, are houses to be seen with two doors and even some with small windows. The floor is always of packed earth.

The furnishings of the living room are limited in general to beds, improvised of boards placed on the ground or on logs, and covered with mats. The hammock is little used; it is generally reserved for children. The furnishings and domestic

¹⁹ Blom and LaFarge, 1927, 2: 342-345.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 2: 385.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2: 346.

²² *Ibid.*, 2: 345-349.

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352 utensils pertaining to the other room include three tables of varying form and size. One of these, about 60 cm. high, is called *akhintel*,²³ and serves as a support for the metate (*chá*). Another smaller table (*mattamalté*) has three legs and is circular in form; it is used in making tortillas. The third table (*ucbalté*), also small but quadrangular, is used in serving food. Three benches of hollow logs (415 *tzantel*) and small chairs (*taburetes*) serve as seats. Deep baskets and gasoline 251 boxes are used for holding clothes. Hanging from the roof is always to be seen a disk made of vines (*likin-nab*). This is used to keep comestibles from the rats. The other implements are the griddle, pots, and other vessels of clay, and calabashes and gourds in various forms and dimensions.

343 Besides the fowl pen (*na-mut*) and the pigpen (*na-chitan*) it is common to [417] see near the house the *temazcal*, or steam bath (*pus*). It is made of clay and irregularly shaped stones; it is rectangular with a small door in front and a ventilator in the rear. It is usual to cover it with a small shelter of straw. The use of the *temazcal* [184] is common in the highlands. It is almost not to be found from Ocbingo northward.

291 Each village has its own costume; however, local variations conform to a 184 certain pattern which changes according to the altitudes and climate. Thus, in the region of Los Altos the usual pattern of dress is the following: for men, short cotton trousers (*uex*)²⁴ and cotton shirt (*kú*) reaching to the knees, a sash (*chukichut*) of wool or cotton and in most cases red in color, a poncho (*tzots*) made of wool and in most cases dark grey in color, a handkerchief (*chukkil*), a straw hat (*pixol*), and leather sandals (*xarab*); women wear a white blouse (*kú*) and a blue shirt (*tzequi*), both made either of wool or of cotton, and a red woolen sash (*chukichut*). Some women in going out-of-doors add a woolen *rebozo*. Women use also a cotton cloth (*titz-cal*) to carry small children. They wear no footgear.

In the *tierra caliente* the dress of the women is almost the same except that it is cleaner. On the other hand that of the men, although equally clean, presents marked differences: the trousers are longer and the shirt shorter, coming to resemble an open blouse or *guayabera*. The sash and the poncho cease to be indispensable [177] garments. It is in this region that there is most use of trousers and shirt in European style.

551 In Tenejapa, Starr found that the Indians had Tzeltal surnames. He says, 582 "We feel sure that these are *not* nicknames, but the old family names still pre- 114 served."²⁵ He does not give examples, and says nothing about any relation between these name-groups and marriage. Blom and LaFarge make no note of such names, and say, "there are no formal restrictions on marriage."²⁶

582 Villa found Indian surnames present in Chanal, Tenejapa, Cancuc, and Oxchuc, 551 and was told that marriage is not allowed, or is at least strongly discouraged, between persons of the same Indian surname. In Chanal an informant indicated that such

[184] ²³ The names of these objects vary from one village to another, those which are described here were obtained in Chanal.

²⁴ The names of some of these garments vary likewise from one village to another, here Villa gives names used in Chanal.

²⁵ Starr, 1902, p. 73.

²⁶ Blom and LaFarge, 1907, p. 990.

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a marriage was incestuous in the same sense as marriage between close relations. These surnames are transmitted patrilineally. Of ten informants in Chanal, nine gave their Indian surnames; the tenth said he had none. Furthermore, in cases where potential spouses have the same Spanish surname but different Indian surnames—and such cases occur—marriage between such persons is similarly discouraged. And in San Martín, Tenango, Bachajón, Citalá, Guaquitepec, Chilón, Yajalón, and Petalcingo, where apparently the Indian surnames do not exist, Villa received information to the effect that marriage between persons of the same Spanish surname is disapproved.⁵⁵¹

Indian surnames noted by Villa, with translations offered him, follow:

CHANAL: Yemuc (large mouth), Xampil, Tiub, Calabal, Chicó, Cories, Comistal.

TENEJAPA: Tzurin ('sowing'), Hovitzil (mad dog), Uacax (cow), Chacax (?), Mee-mut (mother hen), Lobal (banana), Ton (stomach).

CANCUC: Onom, Sav, Chig-yax, Coreta, Caylan-pucú, Hokob-canela.

OXCHUC: Chinbac (small bone), Aquilan (from Aguilar), Chichol (tomato), Barsen (pinto), Nimail (squash-tip), Holchi (deer head).

In all the highland villages information was given to the effect that each *pueblo* (town, with its rural population, if any) is endogamous; in most instances the endogamy was represented as absolute. As some of the communities include only a few score of households, the matter requires further investigation.⁶²¹

The communities of Cancuc, Oxchuc, and Bachajón (and apparently only these) are divided into antagonistic sub-communities called *calpules*. (Neither Starr nor Blom and LaFarge give information on this point.) In each case an imaginary east-west line across the plaza divides the northern lands of the one calpul from the southern lands of the other. In Cancuc (at least) the lands of the north are considered "hot," those of the south "cold," with corresponding favorable and unfavorable connotations as to their fertility. In Cancuc the northern calpul is called either *mukul calpul* 'large calpul' or else *alankuluhibal*; the southern is called *bikit calpul* 'small calpul' or else *kalankuluhibal*. Each calpul (*barrio* to the Ladinos) had its own government, established by the members of each calpul independently of the formal local government, which, recognized by the state and national authorities, acts for both calpules in matters that must be taken to the outside authorities. In Oxchuc the calpul officers are one *presidente*, two *alcaldes* or *cantakines*, two *gobernadores*, two *catinab* 'very respected chiefs,'⁶²¹

⁵⁵¹ Among the Laranés there are patrilineal, totally named kinships grouped into two exogamous phratries (Soustelle, 1922); it is likely that among the ancient Maya of Yucatan there was surname exogamy. Landa says (Section XXIV), "the Indians consider all of the same name related, and treat them accordingly." Thus also in cases of human marriage another of the same name, because this was for them a great infamy" (Gates, 1937, p. 20). Landa also says (Section XXV), "one did they ever marry one bearing their own name on the father's side, for this was considered a very bad thing." On the subject of Maya names, Roys says, "The 'Maya family name, which was perpetuated in the male line, survived the Conquest, but the old pagan pre-names were abolished and replaced by Spanish Christian names when the Indians were baptized. Two varieties of pre-names are well known: one indicating a man's profession or office, and the other, derived from his mother and preceded by the prefix Na-. The Maya called the latter the 'na-' and there were also two other classes of pre-names, which they called the 'boy-name' and the 'young name.' Many of the 'boy-names' are referable to fauna-names, especially those of birds, while some of the 'young names' appear to be descriptive. It seems to have been possible for a single person to have borne all four names" (Roys, 1924, p. 106).

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and four *chuycales*, who are in charge of sacred matters. Certain shamans, called *dzunubiles*, also participate in calpul government.

In-Cancuc, Villa did not inquire into the matter, but in Oxchuc and in Bachajón the calpules have separate patron saints and are known, in the case of Oxchuc, by the names of San Sebastian and San Geronimo, in the case of Oxchuc, Santo Tomas and La Trinidad. In the church at Bachajón the santos belonging to the north calpul, San Sebastian and two others, stand on the left side of the church, while San Geronimo, San Manuel, and the Virgin, representing the south calpul, stand at the right side. It appears, however, at least in the case of Oxchuc, that the festivals of these saints are maintained by the people of both calpules jointly.

The antagonism between the calpules of Cancuc has expressed itself from time to time in violence. During Villa's stay it was rumored that the people of the southern half were about to attack those of the northern half, and indeed, shots were fired. Blom and LaFarge reported "a dragging feud" in this village. Apparently marriages may and do take place between the calpules; there is no indication, however, that they are exogamous.

In Oxchuc a principal annual ceremony attends the transfer from one calpul to the other of a certain sacred book. This greatly venerated object was, after some reluctance, shown to Villa. He was requested to deliver to its custodians a dozen rockets, some candles, and some incense, he was then allowed to examine it in the presence of the chiefs and the *chuycales* of both calpules. It is a notebook of twelve paper sheets, 42 by 20 cm. in size; it has a deerskin cover. Of the twelve pages, nine bear writing, all but one on both sides. The text appears to be a series of orders set down by the Spanish authorities in the year 1674. The book is kept in a black wooden box; before and after removing it the *chuycales* prayed, kneeling, while incense was burned and the rockets were discharged.

The book is called *cuhualtin* 'Our Master.' The ceremony of transfer of this sacred object takes place during the thirteen days beginning December 31. The principal members of the government of both calpules, numbering thirteen, assemble in the *cabildo*. The book is placed on a table with thirteen candles, thirteen rosaries, thirteen calabashes of lime mixed with tobacco, and thirteen vessels of atole. During the thirteen days the men remain segregated in the *cabildo* without contact with their homes or with women. Many prayers are uttered. At the conclusion of the period the box containing the book is escorted in solemn procession to the place it occupies during the rest of the year—not in the church, but in a special hut on the outskirts of the calpul of La Trinidad.

Information which Villa received from Indians of Chanal on the customs attending marriage differs in a number of respects from the account given by Blom and LaFarge, or supplements that account, and therefore may be summarized here. There are no professional marriage negotiators. The boy's parents pay, ordinarily, four visits to the girl's parents to complete the agreement. On each visit they bring bread, eggs, fruit, and especially rum. The boy is expected

¹ Blom and LaFarge, 1927, 2: 187.

² *Ibid.* 2: 358-359.

The boy is expected

to live for a year with the girl's parents; then he makes his own home, usually near that of his father. If the boy's parents are sufficiently powerful, they may pay the girl's parents twelve pesos in lieu of the year's service. Villa was informed that a woman unable to pay a debt or a fine may be taken as a secondary wife by any married man who will pay the debt or fine; that a woman who loses her virginity may be bought similarly of her parents for a little rum; and that in the case of any of these polygynous marriages, a single household is maintained. No such household was observed.

No information was obtained on birth customs,²⁰ or on customs in connection with death.²¹

Blom and LaFarge describe a church festival held at Tecojá ranch on June 22 and 23. When Villa visited the highland villages the carnival was being celebrated. In Tenejapa on February 20 he witnessed the "Festival of the Flags" (*tahinalkin*). The (annually elected) leaders of the festival the *alferoces*, assembled in the morning at the church. Each man conveyed a red banner with green edges, fastened to a pole, and each held in his mouth a short hook on which an orange was impaled. Nothing was learned as to the significance of these objects. The *alferoces* remained for a time inside the church drinking rum and singing. They then went by fours to pray in turn before each of the crosses set up in the village. The rest of the day they spent visiting the house of each one of them in turn; in each house they sang the same song sung in the church; in each the host offered rum, so that by nightfall all were drunk. These acts were to be twice repeated during the days following. They had for their stated purpose the announcement of the days of carnival. On the following Thursday the carnival became generally celebrated, and many natives went out costumed and masked.

The *alferoces* were accompanied by musicians, and also by three personages carrying the dried bodies of, respectively, a wild cat, a rodent called *saben*, and an iguana. Villa was informed that these animals are used in a later festal pantomime in which the *alferoces* enact a sowing, and in which these animals are represented as performing their characteristic mischief.

Villa observed other elements of the carnival ritual in Oxchuc. On Thursday, February 24, Indians of the calpul of Santo Tomas assembled in the church where they prayed for a time before the large altar, and then danced and drank rum in the nave. The dance was performed alternately by men and by women, and was accompanied by music from a harp, a guitar, and a rattle made of a calabash and a deer's hoof. On the following day these acts were performed by Indians of the other calpul; on this occasion the music was furnished by two drums and a flute, and the leader (*capitán*) was dressed in red. On this latter day natives of the calpul of Santo Tomas moved in procession through the streets; four individuals bore each a large pole to which were fastened ribbons of various colors; a fifth carried a red banner.

²⁰ Blom and LaFarge, 1927, 2:359.

²¹ *Ibid.* 2:360-362.

²² *Ibid.* 2:364-365.

²³ The frequent association, in Middle America, of small animals, especially furred animals, with festivals, in connection with ideas of fertility and of festal buffoonery, has been noted. See Redfield, 1936, pp. 237-243.

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535 carried a red banner. At the church the four men performed a dance. Divided into pairs facing each other at a distance of 6 m., they first shook the ribbons on their poles while giving loud cries, varied by putting the hand over the mouth, and running to meet one another. Then they made a slight inclination of the head, turned half around, and returned to their original places. After repeating this thrice, the pairs exchanged places and performed new figures. At the conclusion they surrounded the flag-bearer, shouting and waving the ribbons.

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[197] Although harp and guitars were here used in an apparently religious dance, in several of the communities it appears that the stringed instruments of European origin (guitar, violin, and harp) are used only for secular purposes, the religious musical instruments (which are often kept in the church) consisting of cane flute (*ahmay*) and drums. In Chanal two drums are used, a large drum (*kayob*) and a small one (*chin kayob*). In Tenéjapa the single drum is called *anteel* and is accompanied by a sort of cornet.

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[194] Some minor observances having to do with the cult of the saints may be mentioned. In the highland villages it is usual for each important saint to be represented by two images of which one, the genuine *santo*, is too sacred to be taken from the church; the other, called *debo* (for *doble*) substitutes for the true *santo* in religious processions. In Bachajón the care of the church is alternated weekly between the two *calpules*; on Christmas Eve each church-caretaker (*priero*) must contribute to the decoration of the altar ten little figures of clay, of which five are in the form of a bull, and five in the form of a horse and rider. The church at Citalá contains many *santos* of which two (San Mateo and San Gabriel) are painted black and enjoy special prestige. In this church a straw mat, yellow in color with red ribbons interwoven, is used to kneel upon before the principal saints; it is kept with extraordinary care. At Citalá a principal annual event is the ritual washing of the saints' clothing. This occurs two weeks after Holy Week. The "Great Washing," when the clothing of the principal saints is washed, is performed at a spring where the water is thought to be of absolute purity. The "Small Washing" of the clothes of the lesser saints may be done in the river. The Great Washing is reported as involving the consumption of eight *hijos* and a great quantity of rum.

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114 Although it is evident that the religion of the Tzetzals contains many pagan elements, some of which have been reported by Blom and LaFarge.³⁷ Villa's notes do not add a great deal on this point. The use of hilltop shrines was noted at Oxchuc, where one of these is called Ikal Ahau, apparently after an ancient deity.³⁸ The teacher at Amatenango reports that the Indians there make offerings for rain at a rock marked with a zigzag thought to represent the lightning. No information was obtained on the beliefs as to *nahuales*; this subject is discussed by Blom and LaFarge.³⁹

³⁷ The usage corresponds precisely with that of the pairs of crosses used by the Quintana Roo Maya, of which one, the *cruc cadura*, is moved about in ritual.

³⁸ Blom and LaFarge, 1927, 2:362-374.

³⁹ Núñez de la Vega (1702, p. 91) says, "Los de Oxchuc y de otros pueblos de los Llanos veneran mucho al ídolo que llaman Icalahau, que quiere decir negro principal, o señor de negros," as quoted in Beretta, 1912, p. 244.

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by Blom and LaFarge.¹¹ At Tenejapa and again at Guaquitepec, Villa met persons terrified by fears of witchcraft; it is apparent that the subject is important throughout the region. The word for witch is *agchamel*, and the phrase used is to the effect that the witch "eats" his victim. Villa understood this to refer to the belief that a person's soul may be lured away from his body, a notion consistent with facts reported by Blom and LaFarge.¹²

Villa's notes establish the fact that the nineteen-month pagan calendar is in current use in the highlands, at least in Chanal, Cancuc, and Oxchuc. In 1702 Nuñez de la Vega¹³ published the names of twenty days of the month; these have apparently not been reported since. In 1845 Emeterio Pineda¹⁴ gave for the first time (but for the Tzotzils) the names of the months, omitting only the name *chayquin* for the five-day period. In 1888 Vicente Pineda¹⁵ furnished a complete list of the months for the Tzeltals. Villa was informed that the month *Yaxkin* ended in November so that the new year would begin in the second week of January. Starr¹⁶ says that the first twenty-day period (*Tzin*) begins January 1. Becerra¹⁷ says that the year should begin with the winter solstice. However, he gives, based on information received from the Indians themselves, a table¹⁸ correlating the variations from village to village; thus, the month *Batzul*, first of the year, begins in Oxchuc on January 1, in Cancuc on the second and in Tenejapa on the third. Furthermore, according to this author, there is a marked difference between the correlation followed by the Tzeltals and that followed by the Tzotzils; thus the month *Olaiti*¹⁹ begins among the Tzeltals on March 27 and among the Tzotzils on April 12. The list of months Villa secured differs from both Starr's and Pineda's list, but agrees with that of Becerra.

Batzul	Time of harvest)
Zakilab	Clearing the milpa begins)
Agelchar	The clearing continues)
Mac	Time of sowing)
Olaiti	Time of sowing)
Jul-ol	Time of sowing)
Uec-cachauquin	No work)
Joqueen-ahau	Time of sowing in the tierra caliente)
Chin-uch	Time of weeding)
Mucul-uch	Time of weeding)
Juc-uinquit	Time of resting)
Uac-uinquit	"
Je-uinquit	"
Chan-uinquit	"
Ox-uinquit	"
Poon (Oxobre)	(When the new ear forms)
Yax-kin (termina con Noviembre)	"
Mux	"
Tzun	"

¹¹ Blom and LaFarge, 1927, 2, 369-371.¹² *Ibid.*, 2, 371.¹³ Nuñez de la Vega, 1702.¹⁴ Emeterio Pineda, 1845, p. 111.¹⁵ Vicente Pineda, 1888, pp. 130-131.¹⁶ Starr, 1908, p. 127.¹⁷ Becerra, 1933, p. 50.¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Table 8.¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Table 10.

Concerning the correspondence between the months and the agricultural activities, Emeterio Pineda says:

Moc is the month in which fences should be repaired, and *Olalti* is that in which the sowing is to be done, no matter what may be the condition of the atmosphere, so that if rain fails or is insufficient or is excessive, nevertheless it may not be done in any other month even though then weather and precipitation permit.

Uch (*Uch*): in this month plants are attacked by ailments and insects, in particular by insects such as plant lice which weaken and destroy them; in the month of *Eleck* (*Eluck*) the favorable winds should cure them. But in case they are not favorable, the loss of many plants is sure, as, for example, the potato which neither flowers nor gives a yield. *Nichquin* corresponds with the period of flowering, *Shalzinquil* with pollenization and *Xchibalzinquil*, *Yoxibalzinquil* and *Xchanibalzinquil* with the three periods of the formation of the seed: that of the pearl, that of the milk and that of the starch.

Poin (*Pom*): in this month honey may be taken from the hives, and the harvest may be carried in. *Mux* represents the beginning of cold, and *Yaxquin* the Christmas season.⁴⁶

O. D. E. Bunge quotes this paragraph but attributes it erroneously to Nunez de la Vega.⁴⁷ Bunge's publication provides other interesting data on this subject. It may be added that the nineteen-month calendar with close relation to the agricultural year has recently been reported by Weitlaner⁴⁸ for a non-Maya people, the Chinantec, in northern Oaxaca, and for the Mazatec, a people neighboring the Chinantec.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Emeterio Pineda, 1945, p. 118.

⁴⁷ Bunge, 1935, p. 54.

⁴⁸ Weitlaner, 1936, pp. 197-201.

⁴⁹ Bevan, 1938, p. 5.

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